

VZCZCXRO3457
PP RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBUL #3362/01 2921304
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 191304Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2378
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003362

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [EIND](#) [ETRD](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#)
SUBJECT: IRANIAN AID AND CHILD LABOR KEY LABOR MINISTRY
CONCERNS

REF: A. STATE 92560
[1](#)B. STATE 03076

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: In a review of child labor issues, Afghanistan Ministry of Labor Director of International Relations Ahmad Komail focused on issues of foreign criminals preying on the children of the poor, foreign government influence on his ministry, and ineffective staffing policies pursued within his ministry. He also noted that Afghanistan,s 10 private orphanages were caring for their children much more effectively than the 54 government-run orphanages. Describing his ministry as subject to Iranian &manipulations,8 Komail hinted broadly at the need for increased support from the United States to check this influence and improve the Ministry,s social outreach. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Afghanistan Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoL) Director of International Relations Komail met with Poloff October 15 as a follow-up to our demarche on DOL,s child labor report. Komail,s office had prepared an eight-page response to questions we had posed in our last meeting on September 30. His paper, however, largely extolled the virtues of Ministry projects and his oral comments contradicted this paper. Speaking at length on the vulnerability of the desperately poor to criminal influence, he identified worsening conditions for children, including child neglect, runaways, and the selling of children abroad for forced labor and organ harvesting, as serious problems.

Pernicious Foreign Influences

[1](#)3. (SBU) Komail said the ministry identifies 23 categories of child labor. He noted that girls are particularly vulnerable in two ways: when sold for forced marriages, and when kidnapped and sold for sexual abuse or third-party marriage. He believed the latter cases to be particularly appalling, as some families sell their daughters to Pakistanis for a mere USD 200-300. Boys, said Komail, are especially vulnerable to foreign military recruitment. He reported rumors that the Iranian government had offered entire families visas in exchange for sending their sons to fight in Gaza. The poor fall prey to numerous schemes, and in Komail,s view, the predator influences are usually foreign.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Komail complained at length about a current missed opportunity for training: he said that the Iranian government has offered USD 400,000 to the MoL for capacity-training, but that his minister had rejected the offer, fearing that the United States would look askance at such direct Iranian influence on the Afghan government. The opportunity to accept the offer extends until next week; Komail was clearly seeking our assistance to either persuade his Minister to accept the deal, or submit a counter-offer. He regaled us with stories of attempts by the Iranian embassy to bribe, pressure, and win favor with members of his ministry, undesirable from his point of view, as he personally dislikes

the Iranians.

A Potential for Corruption

¶5. (SBU) Komail claims his work is hampered both by a lack of budget and by ineffective colleagues. He said most members of his ministry are political appointees; most lack money and are susceptible to bribery; and some actively avoid the media, seeking to squelch discussion of sensitive issues or to raise awareness of social problems within the country. He believes the MoL has difficulty attracting qualified people with the necessary skills and background, and therefore, capacity-building is crucial. He also identified some directors as inappropriate choices for their jobs, implying they had been selected deliberately for their lack of interest or background. Emphasizing that most ministerial employees lack wealth and are thus easily corruptible, he took pains to underscore that he did not need money, and so would avoid that fate, but that at any time his colleagues might succumb to the ongoing temptation.

Solutions?

¶6. (U) Dejectedly, Komail advised us to look to civil society rather than the government for solutions to problems such as child labor. By way of example, he described the superior living conditions for children living in the ten private orphanages in country, compared to the 54 government-run

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orphanages. The private facilities provided better food, clothing, and education to their wards; he could do little to match them.

¶7. (SBU) Apparently contradicting his position on NGO,s, Komail went on to suggest the lack of progress to date in solving many Afghan social problems rests with the failure of donors to empower ministries through direct funding. He asserted that donor funding for MoL-related development projects must be passed through his office; only with ministerial oversight could international donor efforts be effectively utilized and proper priorities identified. Then, contradicting his views on the Iranians, he implied that he would encourage their funding if necessary.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Komail,s relaxed attitude and easy demeanor belied the intensity of his critical comments on the functioning of his ministry. He took pains to highlight the Iranian aid offer and explicitly cited it as a reason for increasing U.S. assistance to check Iranian &influence.8 However, Komail did not make a convincing case for doing more than building capacity within his ministry, since, by his own admission, the MoL faces significant problems in formulating and implementing policy.
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